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ABSTRACT

This information sheet summarizes challenges and strategies for identifying and serving gifted children who are recent immigrants. Both challenges and strategies are identified for linguistic, cultural, economic, attitudinal, sociocultural, peer, cross-cultural, intergenerational, and school system aspects. A total of 28 strategies are offered, including: provide enrichment activities to students perceived as "not ready" for gifted programs; explain the concept of gifted programs to parents in their native language; consider aspirations of the immigrant group as well as parents' occupation and education; provide opportunities for a peer support counseling group; use various approaches to model conflict resolution; increase motivation for children to identify themselves as candidates for gifted programs; use nonverbal expressive arts to involve the family; and assess from the perspective of individual learning styles. (Includes 16 references.) (DB)

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IDENTIFYING and SERVING RECENT IMMIGRANT CHILDREN WHO ARE GIFTED

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The challenge of identifying gifted children and providing them with appropriate educational services is particularly complex when they are recent immigrants to the United States. Linguistic and cultural backgrounds, economic and attitudinal factors, sociocultural peer-group expectations, cross-cultural stress, and intergenerational conflict may all influence efforts to recognize and provide appropriate learning opportunities. Although immigrant groups are culturally diverse, they share some unique challenges when interfacing with the setting.

Challenges

Linguistic. The process of second language acquisition is long, complex, and developmental. Therefore, attempting to determine a child's intellectual potential by using English-based assessment instruments can lead to erroneous conclusions. In addition, assessment in English is more likely to reflect knowledge of English and interpretation of grammatical structure than general intellectual potential.

Cultural. Traditional customs and sex-role behaviors are likely to differ greatly from those encountered in the U. S. (Sheehy, 1986; Goffin, 1988). Cultural differences in learning styles, listening behaviors (Trueba, 1983), and response patterns (Harris, 1988; Cohen, 1988) often underlie misinterpreted messages.

Economic. Recent immigrants may be economically poor; parents may be supporting households both here and in their native country (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988). Families may be large; older school age children may need to work after school or miss school to earn money.

"Hidden" factors such as illegal immigrant status, limited knowledge about accessing social and health care services, neglect of basic health needs (Clark, 1988, October), and physical and psychological problems caused by the political environment in the native country (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) may also impede educational progress.

Attitudinal. Immigrants may demonstrate a very positive attitude towards schools and learning. However, they may experience feelings of guilt for family members who had to remain behind, or who were hurt or killed in their native country. A gifted child's heightened awareness may increase vulnerability when such circumstances exist.

When a parent or relative is an illegal immigrant the child may fear authority figures (Gratz & Pulley, 1984; Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978; Vasquez, 1988), thereby preventing them from forming close relationships with teachers and other potentionally helpful adults.

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Sociocultural and Peer Expectations. Racial or ethnic conflict, concern for personal safety, or conflicting peer expectations may cause tension and interfere with or redirect the child's natural curiosity and innate love of learning.

Cross-Cultural. Cross-cultural challenges are confusing and may delay the development of a child's sense of self-identity. Continuing cross-cultural stress is often difficult for immigrants to articulate.

Intergenerational. Immigrant children often serve as "interpreters" for the family, and as the children become Americanized they may begin to resent this responsibility, subsequently seen by elders as disassociating with tradition. Resultant coping strategies have a negative effect on self-concept and family relationships (Harris, 1988).

School System. A student may have little, sporadic, or possibly *no* schooling prior to arriving in the U. S. Wei (1983) reported the frequency of wrong dates of birth in school records, a face saving scheme to hide facts about lack of schooling (Center for Educational Research and Innovation, 1987; Vuong, 1988).

Crowded classrooms, staff opposition to special programs, and use of standardized tests may preclude entrance of recent immigrant children into gifted programs. Steinberg and Halsted (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) reported that immigrant children have often been tracked into English as a Second Language programs, then steered towards vocational courses.

Misplacement may occur if gifted students with disabilities are classified solely in terms of their disabilities (Poplin & Wright, 1983), a problem not confined to immigrants. Parents of immigrant children may distrust any "special" classes, including classes for gifted and talented (Wei, 1983).

A disproportionate number of immigrants have been referred for psychological services (Sugai and Maheady, 1988) when their behavior was misinterpreted and labeled as adjustment or achievement problems (Trueba, 1983).

Strategies

The following identification, service, and evaluation strategies may assist education professionals who want to meet the educational needs of immigrant children who are gifted.

Linguistic

1. Provide enrichment activities to students perceived "not ready" for gifted programs.
2. Institute independent or small group research projects using native language references and resources.

3. Help staff members become aware of different language structures.

Cultural
1. Explain the concept of gifted programs to parents in their native language.
2. Talk to parents in their native language to learn about aspects of giftedness valued by their culture.
3. Develop program services that are culturally sensitive and responsive.

Economic
1. Consider aspirations of the immigrant group; pay attention to variables such as the parents' occupation and education.
2. Work only from facts, assume nothing about the economic status or educational background of the family.

Attitudinal
1. Transmit a sense of self-reliance; use a biographical approach concentrating on positive aspects of problem-solving, task commitment, and decision making.
2. Encourage student involvement in publications or community programs.
3. Encourage journal writing and writing of stories and poems.
4. Provide opportunities for a peer support counseling group.

Sociocultural and Peer Group Expectations
1. Use narratives, role-playing, and bibliotherapy to model conflict resolution.
2. Identify conflicting expectations, determine the causes, and provide intervention.

Cross-Cultural
1. Increase motivation for children to identify themselves as candidates for gifted programs by referring to the gifted program as an opportunity for students to work harder and learn more.
2. Use care in selecting staff responsible for identification. If possible, select staff members who are familiar with the child's culture, country, or region.

Intergenerational
1. Use nonverbal expressive arts to involve the family.
2. Use intra/intercultural peer referral as a source of identification.
3. Involve outreach workers for parents and other family members.
4. Use media services in the native language. These services are usually available through local agencies.

School System
1. Identify or place students according to educational background and potential.
2. Interpret the child's behavior in the context of the child's experiences (Ramirez, 1988).
3. Use extracurricular activities as part of the identification process; incorporate successful activities and areas of interest into learning goals.
4. Ensure that the screening and selection committee has knowledge of creative production or performance in the respective culture. Include representative community members on selection committees. Avoid using standard identification instruments.
5. Assess from the perspective of individual learning styles.
6. Place the child in a minimal stress, "culturally congruent" (Trueba, 1983, p.412) environment and observe for a period of time.
7. Periodically, discuss attitudes and possible biases with teachers. Hold informal sessions to air problems and exchange ideas.
8. Use a developmental rather than a crisis-oriented model.

Both society and individuals benefit when a linguistically and culturally diverse population is tapped for talent potential. Problem areas must be defined in the light of specific cultures and culture differences. Attention must be directed to problem-specific techniques to ensure correct placement and opportunities for appropriately differentiated learning experiences that are culturally sensitive.

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